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THE MENDELSSOHNIAN PROGRAMME.

THE substance of Mr. Lucien Wolf's paper on the Zionist Peril printed in this REVIEW (October, 1904) seems to be the thought that the great political and cultural achievements of Western Jews during the nineteenth century are in danger of receiving a setback at the hands of the Zionist dreamers. As I am not a follower of the Zionist heresy, it cannot be my object to defend the movement by refuting objections to it, or by presenting counter arguments in its favour. I have, however, a few thoughts on assimilationism which is the antithesis to Zionism, and which Mr. Wolf associates with the name of Mendelssohn. In the following pages I propose to show that the Mendelssohnian programme of assimilation, while it may have proved beneficial to the Jews, has been disastrous to Judaism, and that therefore the problem of the conservation of our religion is in need of another solution than the one afforded by the Mendelssohnian formula.

Assimilation, we are told, is not fusion. It must stop short of intermarriage. Eat and drink with your neighbour, go to the same schools, read the same books, take an active part in the communal and national life—only your daughter you shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall you take unto your son. The old rabbis knew human nature better when they apprehended that eating and drinking with our neighbour would lead to intermarriage; indeed, in proportion as the rabbinical bars have been let down, intermarriage has become more frequent. Assuming, however, that the tendency to intermarriage may be checked, what effect will continued

endogamy have upon the Jew and his relation to the outside world? It seems to me that the typical physical and mental Jewish traits will become still more prominent as generation follows generation, and thus accentuate the difference between Jew and non-Jew. But the Jewish physiognomy, it is maintained, even without the admixture of foreign blood, tends to approximate towards that of the environment. Granted that such a physiological approximateness exists, granted even that many of the traits acquired in the centuries of ghetto life will disappear, a minority refusing to coalesce with the majority must always be looked upon as alien. Just because the Jews are whites, their stubborn resistance to fusion must become a source of friction, even more so than in the case of the unassimilable black or yellow races. But the modern state, it is said, is built on economic, not theologico-racial, lines. The citizens of a state may have a variety of interests in common without necessarily belonging to the same stock or sect. This is all quite true on the surface, but on the surface only. Wherever men live together, they will not merely transact business with one another, or accept office from one another. Business and civic association leads to social intercourse, and social intercourse leads to fusion. The state creates the nation, and the nation the race. Where a nation or a race is in the making, new elements are welcomed, or at least admitted, upon the tacit understanding that they will be absorbed. When the process of fusion is fairly well advanced, the unassimilable elements are recognized as such, and a race problem ensues. It is the cry of the anti-Semite that the Jew thrives best where the national consciousness is weak. So much, however, must be conceded that, if reference be had to material progress solely, the programme of assimilation has been beneficial to the Jews, and that life has become pleasanter than in the pre-Mendelssohnian era of general barbarization. Racial differences are most brutally expressed at the bottom,

and most keenly felt at the top. The large middle class is little disturbed by the social ban: the privileges of citizenship and the freedom of engaging in all the pursuits of life are no small blessing, unknown to the Jew of pre-emancipation times, so eagerly yearned for by our brethren in Eastern Europe.

At what cost to Judaism, however, has the Western Jew won these privileges? It is Riesser, I believe, who emphatically repudiated the thought that the religious reforms were being introduced for the purpose of justifying the demand of citizenship, maintaining that political equality was due to the Jews as an inalienable right, irrespective of the ritual of the synagogue, and that even to seem to barter away any portion of their religion for civic privileges were ignoble. The trend of affairs, however, from the days of Mendelssohn onward, shows that the Jews were preparing themselves for political and social (the one seemed to guarantee the other) emancipation by discarding of their own free-will those elements in their life which they regarded as non-essential to their religion, or as late and unwarranted accretions, and which, nevertheless, constituted a barrier to amalgamation. We need only mention the Judeo-German speech which was simply the result of seclusion in the ghetto, although, through association with things sacred, and through its devotional literature perused by the women and the unlettered, it had sunk deep into the Jewish soul. Suffice it to say that the things discarded, no matter how aesthetically repellent or whether originally foreign, were all elements of Jewish life, and that therefore with every such element of Jewish life which disappeared there likewise went a portion of Jewish consciousness. On all sides the aim was clearly the obliteration of differences. To be a Jew no longer meant to live like a Jew, but apparently to worship in the synagogue rather than in the church, and on Saturday rather than on Sunday. A distinction unknown in Jewry was created between the profession within the

synagogue and the life without. It was also assumed that the Christian neighbour was a Christian only on Sunday and just an ordinary citizen during the remainder of the week. Christian elements in the civic life were either ignored or else, divested of their religious significance, secularized. The movement was clearly centrifugal, away from the Jewish life, away from the Jewish past.

The leaders, long after the people had begun to solve in the line of least resistance the problem forced upon them by their sudden emersion from seclusion, supplied the formula. The dispersion, as Mr. Wolf so well puts it, must be accepted as, humanly speaking, an irrevocable fact. The prayers for the coming of the Messiah, the gathering of the dispersed, and the restoration of Jerusalem were cut out. The long-cherished hope of re-nationalization, the very backbone of the Jewish life for eighteen centuries, was declared void. The nation was pronounced dead. "Disband" was the watchword. Instead of a united Israel, there were now multitudinous débris awaiting incorporation into the larger and smaller nationalities of the world. On the grave of the defunct nation national Jewish churches were to rise. The reformers addressed themselves to the task of saving the religious side of Judaism by casting overboard its national features. They meant to conserve the Jewish religion by abandoning its old-time rigidity and by making it flexible to meet changed cultural conditions. The "spirit of the age," however, with its superfine aestheticism and chilling rationalism, seemed to consign Judaism, robbed of its anchorage in life and without a great hope to sustain it, to a slow, lingering death.

Historicism, characteristic of the nineteenth century as rationalism had been of the eighteenth, completed the dismantling of the disabled craft. Interesting and useful investigations were made into the beginnings of the Jewish sermon and the Jewish prayer, of Jewish law and Jewish belief, of Jewish sects, of Jewish customs, of Jewish life in

short; and scholars were so busy tracing the beginnings of things that they neglected the things themselves. It seemed as if, in order to forge weapons against the autonomy of the rabbis and their rigid system, the master minds of the newer Judaism bent their energies upon raising the dead and distant past with its laxities and uncertainties, its clash of opinions, its play of divers forces, its spontaneity and flexibility—in the place of the fixed and petrified result, the indefinite unfolding process. The whole fabric of Jewish life now seemed a bundle of disconnected facts, mere rags and tatters. Inconvenient beliefs, as that in the resurrection of the body, were charged to the credit of Parseeism, or some other foreign religion. The men at the helm believed that they were steering their ship into the safe haven of beginnings only in these latter days to find it pre-empted by Babylonians and Sumerians. Jewish consciousness, driven from life, retreated into the studies of a few learned rabbis who quite resolutely and not unsuccessfully combated the Christian estimate of Judaism as an inferior religion: the dispute turned not upon the live present, but upon the remote past, and was concerned with fine distinctions as to whether the hypocrite Pharisee was the rule, as the Christian scholars maintained, or the exception, as the Jews asserted.

The layman had neither the knowledge nor the desire to be drawn into all those feuds about distant periods of history. To him, if he was of the average, life was inexorable: sabbath observance proved an economic impossibility; a Jewish education for his children, beyond the mere rudiments, unprofitable and undesirable. And to those who belonged to the cultured classes the Christian estimate of their own religion came in their daily reading supplied by Christian writers; the Jewish refutations never reached them. And so they drifted still further away, mentally. And while they sometimes remained themselves nominal Jews, from habit or association or from less ignoble

motives, they had no scruples about leading their children to the baptismal font. *Sauve qui peut!* was the principle. For, on the continent of Europe, the emancipation, alas! remained incomplete: what was granted on paper was refused in life. And so we lost a host of men, our very best minds; by natural selection, we who have remained in the fold are on a fair way to becoming a most stubborn, but also a most mediocre, set of Jews.

And where, as in Anglo-Saxon countries, the open breach through apostasy has been rare, we are fast becoming paganized—not Christianized, mind you—from within. Our environment is only nominally Christian. Christianity is but the veneer; behind it is the ugly reality of unregenerate heathenism. The conversion of pagan Europe to the teachings of the Galilean Jew, begun nineteen centuries ago, is by no means carried to an end. Moreover, the movements which set in with the Renaissance have all had for their aim the resuscitation of classic paganism at the expense of Christianity. State and Church are divorced: while the Gospel is preached within the sacred edifices of Christendom, its spirit as well as its letter are flagrantly violated in the large life without. Take, for example, the glaring contradiction between the position of the Church on the divorce question and the utter disregard of it in the law courts of the state. Few of us Jews have had the opportunity of an acquaintance with Christian church life, and with truly Christian men and women. Most of us, in business or in society, come into contact with nominal Christians. From them comes that disintegrating influence upon our character. As the sorcerer of old, who, unable to curse Israel in the open, sought to ensnare her in the orgies of the Dionysiac cult, so to-day the materialism of the age has engulfed the nominal Jews, those who do and those who do not visit the synagogue (on the high holidays), who are given to a life of gain and pleasure, and are utterly devoid of the higher culture of mind and spirit. Our homes are un-Jewish. We raise our children in an un-

Jewish atmosphere. We surround them with no Jewish associations, no Jewish memories. The Jewish child of tenderest age is taught to lisp the name of Christ before it learns the holy name of God. I am referring to the widely spread celebration of Christmas in our homes. It is just the impressionable minds of babes that ought to be kept free for Jewish associations. And for the very reason that the Christmas celebration in Jewish households is stripped of its religious character which is given to it by our Christian neighbours, it means a step backward into paganism long suppressed by Christianity. Jewish youths and maidens are, moreover, sacrificed to the Moloch of material success and frivolity. Our Christian neighbours presumably amuse themselves; somehow, however, theatres, public eating-houses, summer resorts, are crowded by Jews. And just because these nominal Jews, who neither live nor think as Jews, by the sheer force of the social ban constitute in every community a compact society apart which is labelled "Hebrew" or "Jewish," modern Jewry, unhallowed by the glamour of a religious idea, unsustained by a spiritual hope, presents the sore spectacle of an *ethnic* aggregate of Jews *according to the flesh*, a prey to every fad and religious vagary ("Christian science," for instance), as well as to every disintegrating influence, themselves a disintegrating factor in the larger society of which they are a part.

And the attitude of this larger society is clearly and unmistakably one of hostility. If the state is, perhaps, constructed on economic lines, society is not. Unreasoned and unreasonable emotions wield a tremendous power for the very reason that they well up from the depths of the soul. Instinct, not reason, governs society. And instinct inexorably decrees fusion. It laughs at assimilation, which is never a perfect imitation, and therefore ludicrous. It tolerates least of all a vulgarity which has not the native stamp. It cares little for morals, and a great deal for manners. The Christian (?) clubman is not concerned with

fine and hair-splitting theological distinctions. He sees in the Jewish organization, in spite of all its latitudinarianism, an alien body. He will here and there recognize the individual Jew as an *exception*, and he will demand, not in so many words, but clearly enough to him who has ears to hear, that that Jew sever his social connexions with his Jewish brethren, in other words, renounce his Judaism. What baptism does for the Jew on the continent, mere renunciation of Judaism will accomplish in the Anglo-Saxon countries, although affiliation with a Christian religious body will facilitate matters, and is being resorted to by the ultra-fashionables. For where, within Jewry itself, the various synagogues of a community are so many rungs on the social ladder, with the "Temple" on the top, communion in the Unitarian or Episcopalian church confers vastly superior social prestige.

And in proportion as our homes are paganized the synagogue is secularized. The pulpit has been turned into a lecture platform. Discussion has taken the place of exhortation. The didactic tone predominates. It is not soul thrilling soul, but mind addressing itself to mind, and heart, perchance, appealing to heart. And where the discourse turns away from the trivial, humdrum, un-heroic personal moralities, it relapses into crypto-Zionistic appeals to the race consciousness. The service, as a whole, lacks atmosphere, and the note of piety and conviction is wanting. Religion with us in these latter days, the progress in all other domains notwithstanding, seems to have reverted to its crudest beginnings—ancestor worship. We entomb the mortal remains of our dead in costly mausoleums, and spread a pall of dolorous mourning over our sabbaths and holy days, the seasons of spiritual joy. The high holidays are fast losing their significance; instead of days of penitence, they are made into social functions, grand parades. The eve of Atonement has become an occasion for the display of finery in the pew, and of music (orchestral) in the choir, and of oratory in the pulpit. The call to repentance is

wanting. The prayers are declaimed to a passive audience. The centre of the day's devotions is again the memorial service for the dead. Where pastor and flock meet but once a year, the discourse turns upon the communal and racial rather than upon the personal and human. And while the elders honour their religion by the sacrifice of one day, young Israel indulges in an excellent meal and such other pastime as may be at hand within the privacy of the Jewish club.

And what anarchy of thought in the utterances, oral and written, of our representatives! what lamentable lack of backbone in our leaders! Whatever vagary is pronounced by some Protestant divine who has perchance reasoned himself out of Christian doctrine is at once heralded from our pulpits and in our press as time-honoured teaching of Judaism. Judaism, it seems to me, is a tangible reality given over into the custody of the competent and well-informed; it is sufficiently determined by its original impetus and the mould into which it was cast in its early career to run a definite course throughout its history. Of course, it may be expanded within definite bounds, broadened through the assimilation of extraneous matter, but it cannot be deflected out of its natural course or purpose, if we may so say. The student of English knows what is English and what is not; what is a permissible innovation, and what may pass as English by a charitable stretch of the imagination, and what is simply a schoolboy's blunder and a solecism which is not English at all. And the student of Judaism equally knows how to distinguish between what may pass as Jewish and what is a religious solecism, perpetrated in sheer ignorance or quackery, or, like the argot of the street, picked up in the gutter of religious fads, which is not Jewish at all. Judaism is a system of doctrine and thought capable of definition: it competes with similar systems of thought, and clearly antagonizes others. That, however, which, unsystematically and as occasion demands, is proclaimed as Jewish teaching

by our spokesmen, is very frequently Jewish only because it is delivered by Jews to Jews, racially speaking.

It is high time that we call a halt to the centrifugal movement originating with Mendelssohn. I prefer for the purposes of this paper to place myself above the parties, and, from this higher position, I look upon Zionism as a timely counter-movement of a centripetal character. Never mind the dreams of a redeemed Zion and of the *Judenstaat*. Twentieth-century Jewry will, I believe, both in the East and West, settle down to an acceptance of the dispersion as, humanly speaking, irrevocable. So much of the Mendelssohnian doctrine has come to stay. The cry of the assimilationist, however, "Go out into the world!" will be reversed. "Go back to Judaism!" will be the watchword of the twentieth-century Jew. Or, if we combine the two, we may say: "Go out into the world—but come back as better Jews." What Mr. Wolf designates as Jewish culture proceeding from Mendelssohn and his disciples, was in reality non-Jewish culture possessed by Jews. Not culture for the Jews, but Jewish culture, must become our aim in the future—that culture which, while absorbing the best that the human mind has produced everywhere, and that our environment may offer, shall be strong enough to reject that which is a deadly poison, and keep only what it may take up into its system as a vitalizing and energizing force. There were assimilationists in Alexandria who coquetted with Hellenic culture, and persuaded themselves that the divine Plato borrowed his wisdom from the divine Lawgiver. What a pity, some one has said, that the seventy who rendered the Law into Greek did not at the same time take back with them a Hebrew translation of Plato! The Mendelssohn of Alexandrian Jewry was that fine exemplar of wisdom and piety, of the culture of both mind and soul, Philo the Jew. Like Mendelssohn, he also remained loyal to the Jewish cause, and, although he expounded the entire law in a symbolical manner, was faithful in his observance of the

ceremonial laws, abstaining from forbidden food and the like. And just as Mendelssohn's own family chose the more direct road, by baptism, of entering Christian society, so did Philo's own nephew, Tiberius Alexander, the banker's son, so thoroughly Romanize himself that he was made procurator of Judea, and during the Jewish war acted as adviser in the Roman camp against his own people. In the sequel the Jewish colony of Alexandria was absorbed by the new sect which dressed up the simple faith of the Jew in the pretentious garb of Greek metaphysics, by no means scorning the Philonian contribution. Quite different was the Jew of Mohammedan Spain who, abreast of the movements of the day, at home in the literature of the Arabs, an adept of science and a serious thinker, realized through it all that Hellenic wisdom produced blossoms, but no fruit, and that it behoved him to follow the good old road of Jewish tradition rather than the devious paths of foreign sophistry; he accordingly refused to lose himself in his environment, and created that exquisite Jewish culture which stands matchless in our history.

A generation ago in this country "conservative" meant hats on, more Hebrew, the second holiday; and "radical" hats off, English, the Sunday sabbath, &c. To-day "conservative" should mean something else than the etiquette or language or time of the service. To counteract those disintegrating influences which corrupt our character and threaten our very existence, such must be the meaning of true conservatism, the conservatism of to-day and not of yesterday. Hats on or off, Hebrew or English, Saturday or Sunday—what do these ritualistic quarrels signify in the face of the graver dangers of to-day? I know only of one radical Jew in history, Paul of Tarsus; all the rest of us are conservatives. The aim of the Reform movement in the nineteenth century was from its very start conservative. It meant, while it relaxed its hold upon the peripheral positions, to conserve the centre at all hazards. We shall probably still differ as to what is essential and what is

not. And some will seek to persuade us that the essentials cannot be defended unless the line of defence is widened and ramparts are erected on all sides. Before the citadel of our faith is reached, there must be outer forts. Certain it is that the negative, destructive aspect of our reformation is, among the younger generation, not raised in the atmosphere of German iconoclasm, giving way in this country to a positive, constructive, conservative attitude. Those who in Detroit (Conference of 1903) voted in favour of the maintenance of the traditional sabbath, and who constituted the majority, were for the most part young men who freely admitted that the Sunday sabbath had proved a failure.

We must seek to strengthen the Jewish consciousness and bring back the Jewish life which has almost disappeared. There must be less of convenience, and more of duty; less wavering, and more firmness; less doubt, and more conviction. We must not be ashamed of Judaism, nor hide ourselves with it, nor apologize for it. If we mean to remain loyal to our religion, let us not put a lukewarm construction upon such loyalty, but be very earnest about it. Our homes must be opened wide to Jewish influences and Jewish associations. The board about which we gather must once more be hallowed by prayer and thanksgiving. The sabbath eve cheer must be revived and the queen sabbath re-enthroned, in the home at all hazards. A tone of seriousness must enter our households, and frivolity disappear from them; our very mirth must be softened and subdued. The "Hebrew School" must be reopened. Our Saturday and Sunday sessions are not sufficient for building up in our children a strong Jewish consciousness. Every Jewish boy and girl should be taught to read the Scriptures in the original. Daily sessions, an hour or two after school-hours, are an imperative necessity. Those of maturer age must be organized into clubs for study along Jewish lines. The synagogue must be open daily—not in order to be turned into a concert- or lecture-hall, but to be used for legitimate, serious, Jewish purposes.

There is no reason why the merchant or the wage-earner should not give a half-hour in the morning and a half-hour in the evening to his devotions, on his way to and from his place of business. The pulpit must be reconsecrated and devoted exclusively to its own purposes. We have a multitude of able and eloquent preachers; let us have, in the larger centres at least, thoroughly trained and competent leaders of Jewish thought, men who shall give their time and energy to serious meditation, and who, by the wisdom of their judgment, the weight of their scholarship, the breadth of their culture, the holiness of their life, shall inspire confidence in their counsel and guidance. The world admires individuality, character, colour. The Jew who will be firm enough to be himself will command respect, and the rabbi who will be firm enough to be the Jew will command attention.

The pure historicism which tears up but does not build, which places a relative value upon all events in history, and discerns absoluteness nowhere, which, perchance, knows the beginnings of movements but not their ends, which, in short, seeks for *cause* and neglects the *meaning*, must be given up. Jewish doctrine must be reformulated, restated in the terms of all the newer knowledge—not capitulate to every pseudo-science and pseudo-philosophy, but hold its own and defend its position with the weapons which true science and true philosophy will readily furnish. The Jewish creed is, after all, very simple. "All this is everlastingly true and established with us, that he is the Lord our God, and there is none beside him, and we are Israel his people." One God, man created in his image, and Israel his anointed servant—such is the sum of our religion, upon which all the rest is but a commentary. The One God is necessarily a holy, spiritual being, inhabiting eternity and diffusing his glory throughout the world, its King and Sovereign. Man, created in the image of God, can never stray altogether away from his Maker, with whom he may commune in prayer, and who, though a

stern Judge, is also a loving, forgiving Father, who causes his children to share in his own everlasting life. Israel, the chosen servant of God, his prophet and apostle, is at once the organ of divine revelation and the redeemer of mankind, by whose agency the kingdom of God shall come, and about whom all humanity shall unite in acknowledging the sovereignty of the divine will. In Israel the divine presence indwells; through Israel the divine purpose is to be realized. Israel's prerogative is a high one, but so also her duty. She must conquer the world for the kingdom of God. Such is the meaning of her dispersion; such that of her martyrdom. She is the Mother-Church founded by God—like him in and for the world, but not of it. She must lend no ear to the allurements of the hour, her eye fixed upon her future triumph, her mind dwelling upon that day on which she accepted the priesthood of the Most High. The Roman Catholic Church answered the hostile movements of the nineteenth century with the dogma of the infallibility of her head. Israel, with equal firmness, must meet the Anti-Semitism of the day with the unequivocal reaffirmation of her divine election.

The centrifugal tendencies of the assimilationist programme have resulted in placing our corporate existence in a condition *ad interim* waiting for the last man to desert us. "I shall not die, but live!"—in these ancient words the newer formula expresses itself. We shall live, not as stragglers behind the movements of the world, nor as counterfeits of the world's realities, nor as footnotes to the world's texts. We shall live in a world of thought of our own making, for the sake of which alone Providence has ordained that we continue our separate existence. We shall live the Jewish life, for which we must be prepared to make sacrifices, believing as we do that only through that life may we find favour in the sight of God and man, and realize whatever potencies there lie in us as children of God.

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